Emerging Young Adults' Perceived Social Status and Motivators for Seeking Dental Care: A Qualitative Study

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Objectives

Emerging young adulthood is a unique developmental period (aged 18-25) that presents opportunities and challenges as individuals experience changes in education and employment. Dental utilization may be disrupted by these changes, ultimately impacting oral health.

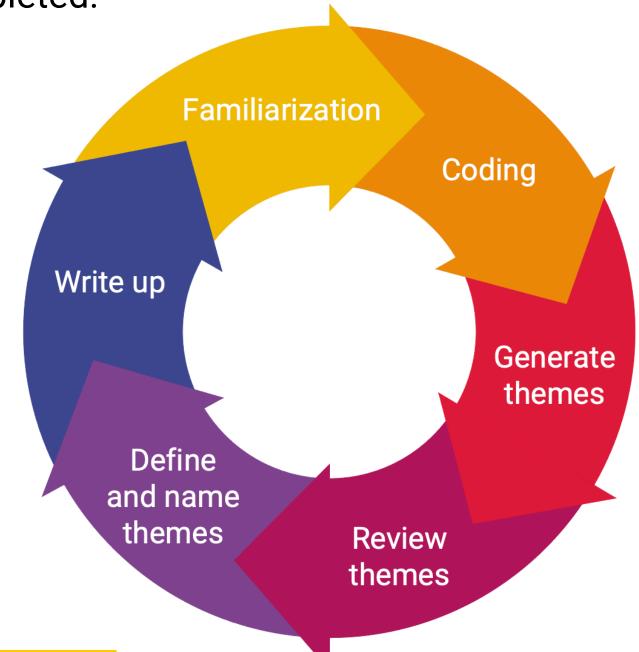
Perceived social status (PSS), a measure of social status, reflects one's perception of their own social and economic experiences throughout their lifetime relative to others.

STUDY AIMS

- 1. Explore the role of PSS in seeking dental care among young adults.
- 2. Identify motivators to seeking dental care.

Methods

- In the summer of 2022, EYA were recruited from the Admissions Clinic at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics.
- One-on-one semi-structured interviews of young adults, survey questions.
- Thematic analysis of transcribed qualitative data was completed.



Results

- 45 participated: 17 reported low PSS, 15 reported moderate PSS, and 13 high PSS.
- 4 major themes emerged, and narratives shift from those reporting low PSS and those reporting high PSS:
 - 1. Social pressures: perception of others in negative light to "keeping up with the Jonses";
 - 2. Positive relationships: active encouragement to parental guidance throughout childhood;
 - 3. Establishing dental home: never having dental home to re-establishing a dental home;
 - 4. Dental need: caries/pain to more aesthetic treatment

Motivators for Seeking Dental Care Positive Establishing a Social Pressures **Dental Need** Relationships **Dental Provider** So, um, I had braces "So just like my You know, just kind of before and then of parents have always that routine care... it "Well, you know, like course I didn't wear my told me, if you have social media and was just like that retainer. I sucked. So, insurance and you nothing was wrong, but everything... like uh, my gap come back. can get your teeth yeah, I wanted to see a perfect teeth." So, I want that fixed clean for free then go dentist right when I (23, Female, White) and then I just want like do that and that's moved back to Iowa. white teeth." what I did." (Male, 21, White) (24, Female, White) (20, Male, White) Two Fridays ago, my "Snapchat, you know, face was a balloon and "My dad told me I how people can post, hurt...I couldn't take it. I needed to get in after "My dentist didn't take like, send it and so went to the truck that. He said it's a my insurance people can stop..."I was like please yearly thing I should anymore. I needed to anonymously pipe up. take this out." I need probably be doing. I find a new one." Yeah...when I was the rest [wisdom teeth] was like, OK." (19, Male, White) younger younger...big (19, Female, White) thing." (24, Female, (18, Female, White) Hispanic/Latino) "I never really knew "I had this one how serious it was until "It's the first thing counselor at a school "This is my first time at I broke the first tooth... a dental office... only people see and before I graduated, she how severe the pain sometimes smell. I was like "oh you're went to the programs could get. I guess that I don't have a bad the university did at my pregnant now you have two kids and should like be taking of mouth." school." some of my tooth pain (23, Male, yourself." (20, Male, White) has been almost as Hispanic/Latino) (18, Female, Black/ bad as like childbirth." African American) (25, Female, White)

Results

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of emerging young adults aged 18-25 years seeking dental care at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics (N=45)

	Low PSS	Mod PSS	High PSS
	Number (%)	Number (%)	Number (%
Total	17	15	13
Age (years) 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25	2 (11.8)	2 (13.3)	0 (0.0)
	1 (5.9)	3 (20.0)	0 (0.0)
	2 (11.8)	4 (26.7)	2 (15.4)
	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	3 (23.1)
	4 (23.5)	1 (6.7)	1 (7.7)
	2 (11.8)	2 (13.3)	2 (15.4)
	2 (11.8)	1 (6.7)	2 (15.4)
	3 (17.6)	2 (13.3)	3 (23.1)
Gender Male Female Non-binary	7 (41.2)	6 (40.0)	5 (38.5)
	10 (58.8)	9 (60.0)	7 (53.8)
	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
Race/Ethnicity Asian Black/African American Hispanic/Latino Middle Eastern/Northern African Other or multiracial White	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
	2 (11.8)	5 (33.3)	0 (0.0)
	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (15.4)
	3 (17.7)	1 (6.7)	2 (15.4)
	10 (58.8)	9 (60.0)	7 (53.8)
Employment status Full time Part time Unemployed	7 (41.2) 4 (23.5) 6 (35.3)	9 (60.0) 3 (20.0) 3 (20.0)	6 (42.2) 3 (23.1) 4 (30.8)
Dental Insurance Medicaid Private Unsure None	15 (88.2)	12 (80.0)	8 (61.5)
	1 (5.9)	3 (20.0)	4 (30.8)
	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.7)
	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Completed Education Less than high school High school degree/GED 2-year degree 4-year degree or more	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
	11 (64.7)	13 (86.7)	10 (76.9)
	2 (11.8)	2 (13.3)	0 (0.0)
	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	3 (23.1)
Current Education Preparing for GED 2-year degree 4-year degree or more Not in school	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
	0 (0.0)	4 (26.7)	3 (23.1)
	1 (5.9)	3 (20.0)	6 (46.2)
	15 (88.2)	8 (53.3)	0 (0.0)

Conclusions

- Emerging young adulthood should not be overlooked in the lifespan.
- Significant differences in personal experiences and motivating factors were observed.
- As PSS increased, motivators decreased in dental need and self-drivers were in motion.
- Targeted programmatic efforts should be made early to provide individuals with low PSS the tools to guide healthy behaviors.

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